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## Written Inputs for the Preparation of the Zero Draft of the Pact for the Future

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The [Monash Sustainable Development Institute \(MSDI\)](#) is a world-leading transdisciplinary research, education and engagement institute, based at Monash University, which works to understand, influence and transform systems for sustainable development in Australia and globally. The following recommendations are based on learnings from several of MSDI's areas of work, in particular as lead contributors to the Independent Group of Scientists and the '[Global Sustainable Development Report 2023](#)'<sup>1,2</sup>, and as hosts of the [UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network \(SDSN\) Regional Network for Australia, New Zealand & Pacific](#).

## Chapter I. Sustainable development and financing for development

- **United Nations Member States are urged to establish an SDG Transformation Framework for Accelerated Action.** This framework would consist of 6 elements: (1) National Plans for Transformative Accelerated Action grounded in science and inclusive processes to identify and harness SDG synergies and reduce negative transboundary spillovers; (2) local and industry-specific planning to feed into national plans; (3) initiatives through the Addis Ababa Action Agenda or otherwise to increase fiscal space, including tax reforms, debt restructuring and relief and increased engagement from international financial institutions for SDG implementation; (4) investing in SDG related data, science-based tools and policy learning with attention to closing SDG data and research and development spending gaps; (5) establishing partnerships to strengthen the science-policy-society interface and (6) investing in measures to improve accountability of governments and other stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, *Global Sustainable Development Report 2023: Times of crisis, times of change: Science for accelerating transformations to sustainable development*, (United Nations, New York, 2023)

<sup>2</sup> Malekpour, S., Allen, C. *et al.* (2023). What scientists need to do to accelerate progress on the SDGs. *Nature*, 621(7978), 250-254. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-023-02808-x>

- **All countries should support increased funding from multilateral development banks and a reform of the global financial architecture to provide increased funding for investment in achieving the SDGs particularly in low- and lower-middle-income countries.** Low-income countries face a massive financing gap in attempting to deliver on the SDGs. Greatly increased funding is needed for governments and private businesses to carry out SDG actions in low and lower-middle-income countries. Credit rating systems and debt sustainability metrics need to be reformed to facilitate long term sustainable development.
- **All countries need to build capacities essential for transformation at individual, institutional and network levels.** National transformation plans should invest in the capacities to strategize, innovate, manage conflicts, identify and overcome impediments and cope with crises and risks. Leveraging synergies between SDGs and minimizing tradeoffs calls for horizontal coordination between departments, and vertical coordination across levels of government as well as capacities to integrate policies from multiple fields and goals – for example, between agriculture, environment, water, social and labor policies, in line with the interlinked nature of the SDGs. Building these capacities is very different from what development cooperation has undertaken in the last decades; building capacity needs to happen in the North and the South, and the role of the HLPF in building capacity should be sharpened.
- **Going forward, much greater attention must be given to addressing SDG interlinkages and international spillovers, as these are detrimental to achieving sustainable development.** Science tools and decision-making need to reflect unique synergies and trade-offs, which have been shown to vary across contexts, groups and time. Decision-makers can rely on a growing body of evidence and scenario modelling to manage trade-offs and maximize synergies between SDGs and across borders. Examples of important results include:
  - Seven SDGs have been identified as particularly significant for addressing multiple SDGs: SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 6 (water and sanitation), SDG 7 (clean and affordable energy), and SDG 17 (partnerships).
  - Business-as-usual strategies to promote targets belonging to SDGs 2 (zero hunger) and 8 (decent work and economic growth) carry high risks of trade-offs and undermining SDG progress in other areas.
  - Synergies are found to be higher for female, younger, and rural populations for whom trade-offs are more negligible – i.e., progress on a given SDG indicator for these groups will generally foster progress for the group on other SDG indicators. Removing barriers for these frequently marginalized groups is an important step for leveraging synergies.
  - On average, more negative spillovers are generated by high-income countries, to the detriment of low-income countries. OECD and EU countries on average have the highest SDG achievements, but also impose more costs on other countries that are not counted in their national measures of SDG progress.
- **Global scenario projections show that business-as-usual strategies will not deliver the SDGs by 2030, or even 2050, but working through the six key entry points identified in the Global**

**Sustainable Development Report 2023 to leverage interlinkages in line with national circumstances and priorities could unleash rapid progress.** These entry points are (1) Human well-being and capabilities, (2) Sustainable and just economies, (3) Sustainable food systems and nutrition patterns, (4) Energy decarbonization with universal access, (5) Urban and peri-urban development, and (6) Global environmental commons.

- **As part of the review of the focus on beyond GDP metrics, the UN should seek to develop and provide guidelines to assist countries in aligning SDG reporting with the emerging focus in many countries on national wellbeing frameworks.** Nations globally are increasingly recognizing the limitations of GDP as a sole measure of progress and are turning towards more comprehensive frameworks, such as the OECD’s Living Standards Framework, to assess national wellbeing. These frameworks are often stronger than the SDGs in some important areas, such as intergenerational equity, but can be weaker in other areas, such as in recognizing the fundamental importance of environmental sustainability to societal wellbeing. Helping countries align wellbeing frameworks with the SDGs is an opportunity to strengthen and expand national focus on the SDGs, as well as to facilitate the integration of broader wellbeing metrics into national agendas.

### Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

- **The full benefits of science as a public good should be harnessed for the SDGs.** This involves increasing investment in science and innovation systems, especially in low- and middle-income countries; funding and rewarding science that enables the SDGs; as well as promoting open access to scientific research, publications and data and strengthening mechanisms for knowledge sharing including with support for the GSDR.
- **There is an urgent need to implement a clear and dedicated pathway for universities to obtain Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC.** As highlighted by many UN processes and institutions over the years, including the UN Secretary General in 2021, universities, through their education, research and convening power, are absolutely essential for supporting the UN and other stakeholders in developing and implementing “enlightened and evidence-based solutions to the world’s problems.”<sup>3</sup> Individual universities are integral and essential contributors to the NGO ecosystem of UNFCCC and UNEA/UNEP, and make significant contributions to advancing their agendas. However, ECOSOC uses different criteria to define NGOs – in particular that they cannot be established by a governmental entity or intergovernmental agreement, and not receive more than half of their funding from government. There are a few universities that can meet these criteria, however, very many universities cannot. This situation is unfair and precludes universities from usefully and fully contributing to UN and ECOSOC agendas; it must be remedied through the development of specific application criteria that take into account the unique organizational nature of universities.

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<sup>3</sup> Message from Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, to the International Association of University Presidents Triennial Conference, 29 July 2021. <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/un-secretary-general-highlights-importance-universities-during-iaup-triennial>

## Chapter IV. Youth and future generations

- **To truly address and be accountable for the wellbeing of youth and future generations, we need to measure and report on youth progress on the SDGs globally and regularly.** ‘Towards an AusNZPac Youth SDG Index’<sup>4</sup>, a 2023 youth-led report that is the first in the world to use the SDGs framework to measure young people’s progress towards sustainable development, identified a number of key lessons relevant globally:
  - Youth progress on the SDGs must go beyond the obvious youth related indicators (such as educational attainment). To ensure ‘no one is left behind’, it must also include general population indicators disaggregated by youth, as young people often lag behind the rest of the population on the SDGs – for example in areas such as psychological distress, suicide mortality rate, unemployment, rent overburden and homelessness. It must also include general indicators that reflect issues crucial to the wellbeing and future of young people, such as climate action and peace and security.
  - There is need for great focus on filling data gaps in youth-disaggregated data, as this is missing for many SDG indicators and leads to ‘blind spots’ for decision-makers.
  - It is essential that youth are meaningfully and significantly involved in the development of the youth progress report. Young people do not feel that their concerns were well represented in the SDGs framework. Therefore, the SDG framework needs to be “localized” to the needs of young people and future generations, and any gaps in the issues covered by the SDGs need to be filled in. Ensuring meaningful youth representation and consultation in decision making around issues that concern youth is one such gap, and this should be added as a new indicator.

## Chapter V. Transforming global governance

- **The international community needs to coordinate to improve critical underlying conditions for SDG implementation.** Disruptive trends in climate change, rising inequality, biodiversity loss, demographic change and digitalization need to be countered and shaped with actions at all levels in solidarity. Coordinated action should especially focus on: (1) preventing and avoiding violent conflict; (2) opening the necessary fiscal space for action; (3) ensuring meaningful inclusion and engagement of marginalized groups; (4) making digital transformation work for the SDGs; and (5) achieving gender equality through legislation, banning harmful practices, education, and reproductive health.

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<sup>4</sup> SDSN Youth AusNZPac (2023). *Towards an AusNZPac Youth SDG Index: A youth-led pilot to measure progress towards the SDGs*. Melbourne: Sustainable Development Solutions Network – Youth AusNZPac. <https://ap-unsdsn.org/sdsn-youth/ausnzpac-youth-sdg-index/>